



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

6 February 1997

Rt Hon John Major MP  
10 Downing Street

Dear *Prime Minister*

You may recall that when we met on 21 January I gave you a paper, drafted by Reg Empey, containing some suggestions on how participants in the talks could work with the Northern Ireland Office on practical matters. These proposals were intended to show that the political process could still function despite the current impass on decommissioning. They are not, however, seen as a temporary expedient, but as something that could run alongside the talks process, partly as a confidence building measure and partly as a learning process. You said on 21 January that I should explore them further with Michael Ancram.

Accordingly I met Micheal on Thursday, 21 January. The following Monday he gave me a paper headed "Possible Draft Package for Resolving Decommissioning before the Election". The paper contained a brief reference to some of the matters in the Empey paper. Micheal said that if we agreed to his proposals he would then see if other parties were willing to explore the Empey paper. That of course runs counter to the basis on which the Empey paper was put forward, namely that it would help to fill the gap caused by the impass.

While there are some points in Michael's paper, which if they were developed further could help on the decommissioning issue, we told Michael on Monday, 4 February, that we

could not underwrite it as it stood. On Tuesday we received a letter from Michael withdrawing his paper and he confirmed to me in conversation with him yesterday that he did not now intend to consider further any of the ideas in the Empey paper.

I am very disappointed that a way of making progress has been blocked in this way. I hope that you can find some way of negotiating around this road-block for I believe that there is considerable merit in Reg's ideas.

I suspect that the problem is the habitual opposition in the Northern Ireland Office at anything which might involve local politicians, especially unionists. It is similar to the delaying tactics that have been employed with regard to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee. You announced at your Party Conference that the successful reforms to the Scottish Grand Committee, were to be extended to Northern Ireland, a measure that would strengthen the Union. No doubt because of the NIO's desire to move Northern Ireland in the opposite direction your initiative has yet, four months later, to bear fruit. I mention this matter each week to Alastair Goodlad, who, I am sure, tries to help.

Perhaps here too a Prime Ministerial reminder would do the trick.

Sincerely



David Trimble MP